Refugee Camp Education: Hope, Gaps, and Barriers

Allyson Dykstra
Western Michigan University, allydyks@gmail.com

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TITLE: Refugee Camp Education: Hope, Gaps, and Barriers

Jessica Gladden

Maria Ramos Tovar

Allyson Dykstra

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Western Michigan University
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Abstract

The urgency to provide humane living conditions such as food, shelter, safety and education grows with the refugee population as temporary stays become more permanent. Refugees are staying longer in emergency arrangements, which appears to affect mental health, ability to hope, and sustainable coping mechanisms for these populations. With dissatisfactory conditions in camps, this paper intends to explore how refugees cope with their environment and in what ways needs are not being met, in order to explain the present condition of refugee health, their coping mechanisms, and how to combat it.

1. Introduction

According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person outside the boundaries of their nation who is unwilling to 1) return to or 2) accept protection from their country of origin due to a “well-founded fear” of persecution (UNESCO, 2019). When families and individuals must leave their homes to seek refuge elsewhere it is with great grief and consequence. The hope for a family or person uprooting themselves from their country is that it would be safer leaving their home than if they stayed, and that the consequences of leaving would not be too severe. Refugees seek safety when they leave their homes and hope for a better future in doing so. An ideal scenario for a refugee would be that conflict would subside quickly in their home country and after a short stay at a refugee camp, they would be able to return to their country of origin where conditions will have improved. If not returning to their original country, refugees hope to find peace and acceptance in a new land by resettling away from the refugee camp. Refugees wish to have a safe place to call home with opportunities to grow and continue their lives, but for the time in between, a refugee camp is the home of these displaced peoples.
2. Limitations

The conditions for displaced people differ greatly by camp and each host nation produces new challenges to navigate. While topics discussed in this paper are common in refugee camps, each camp is unique and may not have all issues present in this literature or have any that are discussed. This paper aims to highlight the perceived challenges faced by refugee camps based on current perceived refugee hopes as gathered by sample populations. These samples are not representative of the entire refugee population, or of any specific camp or group of people. The purpose of this paper is to explore refugee camp realities in order to gather an understanding of possible gaps in the educational systems offered to refugees as a coping mechanism, and how this ultimately effects the refugee.

3. Refugee Camps

A refugee camp is intended to provide safety for displaced people by temporarily providing shelter, food, and emergency medical help, “but also transitions into long term care for refugees” (UNHCR, 2019, par.3). There are approximately 25.9 million refugees globally with 2.6 million refugees living in camps and millions more living in urban areas and informal dwellings outside of camps. Some 37,000 people are recorded to flee their homes each day. “Nearly one person is forcibly displaced every two seconds as a result of conflict or persecution” (UNHCR, 2019, par.4) which causes a continually increasing global refugee population (UNHCR, 2019).

Despite the intended purpose of refugee camps as emergency safe havens, the current state of these settlements today present obstacles for refugees and does not allow for the initial reason a person seeks refuge there: to have basic needs met. Refugee camps were intended to be emergency shelters but due to current world conditions and political atmosphere, they have
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transformed into semi-permanent establishments. While the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNRA) strives to administer refugee camps with the necessary provisions, camps are consistently over-capacity and unable to delegate adequate essential emergency resources for their populations. This issue has compounded since many locations have evolved into containment areas averaging a likely human displacement “for nearly two decades” (UNHCR, 2019, par.1) instead of the originally assumed temporary stay for the average refugee. This two decade stay in an emergency shelter changes refugee lives and daily operations of refugee camps significantly. Displaced people are expected to live in temporary shelters, receive meager rations, and halt the progression of their lives for, in some cases, 20 years. This greatly encroaches on their human rights for access to certain basic needs and does not produce a positive living environment. Due to the changing permanency climate, the United Nations is stretching to also provide longer term needs, largely referring to “education and helping prepare refugees for life after the camp with job and skills training” (UNHCR, 2019, par.6). This paper will primarily focus on the educational conditions for refugees in camps and the impact it has on the refugees.

3.1 Mental health in refugee camps

Individuals in the displaced community are likely to have suffered trauma and pain but may be disinclined to navigate and cope with mental health challenges (Gladden, 2013). Refugees devote much of their energy ensuring that primary needs are met, which a refugee camp intends to assist its population in, but the resources actually provided to refugees as assistance is much less than is truly needed for the individual. Dr. Gladden interviewed a sample population of east African refugees to gather data on current mental health within Kakuma Refugee Camp. Due to the desperation for primary needs such as food and safety and shelter, it
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was found that the subject population was rarely able to focus on their overarching mental health issues. She summarizes their experiences stating:

*The refugee women’s focus seemed to be on physical needs such as food, shelter, and firewood…Many women spoke of the need for an increase in food – both amount and variety. In addition, many women appeared to be either without their own form of shelter or had very poor conditions within their shelters, for example, many roofs had rusted through and allowed the rain to come in. (Gladden, 2013, pg. 86).*

When prompting women in the Kenyan Kakuma Refugee Camp about mental health and past trauma, the women were more focused on the lack of food and physical needs and would not answer prompts concerning mental health directly; “the overwhelming focus of the participants on physical needs shows that this is an area of great need” (Gladden, 2013, pg. 80). Although high concentrations of PTSD, depression and anxiety, somatization, adjustment disorders, and substance abuse diagnoses are present in refugee communities (Gladden, 2012), refugees have difficulty examining their own health, suggesting that “this population needs assistance in coping” (Gladden, 2012, pg.182). Field observations suggest they are coping reasonably, but high concentrations of these diagnoses suggest additional support for the refugees are still indeed necessary. This further accentuates the great lack of physical needs being met in refugee camps when, given the opportunity to voice any concern in interviews, capable refugee individuals are still needing to over-state all they are missing.

Gladden observed mental health issues in refugee camps going un-dealt with due to the necessary energy exerted to satisfy missing primary needs. Primary needs relating to food, shelter, and safety are the basis of both mental and physical wellness and therefore must be met promptly for survival. Gladden suggests, “after these needs are met, attention could then be
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focused on forming more opportunities to increase emotional coping strategies” (Gladden, 2013, pg.86). Until then, it is necessary for one to devote all attention to ensuring the return of such needs. Humanitarians may wish to aid refugees with mental needs, but when physical needs are not being met, health and energy decline. In this added state of stress it is especially “unlikely that the refugee will be able to cope with their individual circumstances” (Gladden, 2012, pg.190). In this present state, humanitarian focus should begin with providing basic needs to refugees until sustainable food and living accommodations can be met for refugees.

3.2 Refugee hoping and coping

Despite the overwhelming challenges refugees face inside of camps physically and mentally, the refugee population continues to work for a better life. They continue to find ways to cope with the challenges of the present by hoping for an improved future. Coping mechanisms are necessary for refugees to inspire hope in themselves as well as encourage others to find and receive help. As a refugee, a person faces life without physical, financial, and psychological stability; this makes it much harder for the refugee to continue toward productive aspirations. Finding ways to cope despite these circumstances is key for refugee futures. Studies that explore the coping habits of refugees reveal limited strategies due to 1) an overwhelming concern for the much-needed physical supports, and 2) limited options a refugee is presented with from inside the refugee camp (Gladden, 2012). Lazarus and Folkman describe two ways to define coping, “to deal with the emotional response to the problem (emotion-focused coping)” and “to manage or change the problem causing stress (problem-focused coping)” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping appears more common as a tactic used by refugees coping with their circumstances by finding ways to change their circumstances.
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Gladden refers to hope as part of the “cognitive reframing” for refugees; they cope by redefining their position to produce a positive outlook (Gladden, 2012, pg.188). Interviews conducted by Gladden in May 2011 explore the coping mechanisms of 30 Sudanese women living in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. Gladden narrows coping mechanisms used by these refugee women into three strategies: occasionally depending on other women or family members for both physical and emotional support, a belief in God, or hope in education for change in their future lives (Gladden, 2013).

4. Discussion on Kakuma refugee interviews

The following is a secondary data analysis of a set of 30 interviews completed with Sudanese refugee women residing in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. These semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed, and a qualitative data analysis of the transcripts were completed. The analysis revealed several primary themes related to education. These included: 1. Refugee children desire education with the hopes that it will lead to employment and thus a better life; 2. The adults with children in school hoped that their children’s education would benefit them later in life, and 3. The overwhelming majority of young refugee women who wished to attend school were unable to do so in this current system.

4.1 Positive School Community

Without schooling it is hard to hope for a better life. Not attending school may lead a refugee to cope-by-distraction, involving themselves with more negative influences such as gangs and substance abuse. This kind of activity was observed by this researcher at Moria Camp in Lesbos, Greece, and is briefly eluded to by refugees in Gladden’s interviews. When focused on schooling, the refugees can place their hope in a better future and be surrounded by a safe and encouraging community. One refugee explains that barriers still exist within school despite a
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more positive community, “you know sometime they don’t want the Sudanese. If you go there they keep fighting and they give you nothing.” Discrimination and violence are sometimes unavoidable, but it appears that for most refugees, school remains a better environment than the camp life young people may alternatively participate in. For the most part, refugee youth are looking to schools to escape the violence and substance abuse that infiltrates camp life. Schooling is a way to remind the refugee that there are better opportunities for them than they may be surrounded with at present. Gladden summarizes one refugee’s response, “The most important thing to you is education and God to help you. And you can’t follow the bad people who do drugs because you want to do good things and stay in school.”

When asking young refugees what has influenced their life so far, the most common answers were education and God. When a refugee strives for a “good” life, they make it a point to go to school.

“Researcher: What has influenced your life the most so far?
Interpreter: She said that I can stay away from those bad things and I finish my education.
Researcher: So, she tries to have good friends because she wants to stay in school.
Interpreter: She said she don’t want to be friends with anyone who drive her away from school.”

Refugees are making life decisions based on what will give them a better education and ultimately a better life. Youth desire school because there are few alternatives within the camp to cope or otherwise improve their life. When asked how one refugee deals with problems in her life she responded, “if I finish my education maybe at that time it can change [my] life.” This refugee copes by hoping for their future, as for coping with problems in the present, refugees still appear to be struggling.
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4.2 Education leads to employment

A main goal for refugees is to get a job so they can provide for their family and rise above poverty. School is important because it is presently seen as one of few tools within the camp that will lead to sustainable employment and a better life. The refugee women repeatedly spoke of their drive for education—ultimately meaning employment—in the interviews from Kakuma Refugee Camp when asked what the biggest help would be for the refugee she replied, “to go to school.” If anyone in the US could help her, she would want it to be help getting an education. It is a “need” and “very important” in this young woman’s mind to get an education. In summary, “To overcome problems you [young refugee woman] want to be in school to get education, and you say only God is the one to know what will happen. But you hope to get education so you can maybe get a job.” Even when a refugee understands their chances in school are bleak and feel as if there is “no one who can educate her well,” … “she still feels like she needs to go to school.” And needs “someone who can put [her] in good school” in order to make something of her life. One refugee even talked about their aspirations to start their own business and feared that without schooling that dream would be unattainable, “No School… then there is no money to start business for yourself…those are…problem[s] and [my] fears.” Education can change the path of a refugee’s life and provides hope and purpose for the individual and even may extend hope to surrounding community and close family when enrolled. Gladden asks, “What do you hope that education can change for you? What will it do? What will it help you to be able to do?” The refugees answer is simple and direct, with education she becomes self-sufficient, “if she got a job”…it would change everything.

It was within the context of schooling that refugees began to think of others well-being outside of their family as well, “if I get knowledge, I can help somebody and I can help myself.”
Refugees strive to use education to obtain a job and feel secure enough to take care of their immediate needs. Once achieved, they feel they will be well enough to help others as well. This is substantial information because in many places as Gladden reveals, refugees are so overwhelmed they are “unable to provide any support for others, not even the other women around them with similar problems.” But with education they are hopeful about helping and providing for others in need. The government provides some help but “the women said it was not enough help.” Without education and a way to sustain themselves, the refugees are left with barely enough to live, let alone help their community, a refugee remarks, “there are neighbors, but they don’t have help. There is no help.” Help is scarce in these communities because you cannot support others when you cannot even support yourself. This issue invites mental health issues for refugees. Gladden summarizes how powerful hope through education is, and how it can help combat emotions of solitude:

“They stated that with knowledge (from schooling) they hoped to be able to find employment, and a few of the young women even spoke of helping others by obtaining this. This was the only mention within the interviews of being able to help other refugees. In all other cases, the focus of help was entirely on needing it, not giving it. The ability of these young women to look beyond their own situation to the needs of others through their hope of education should not be overlooked and shows how important education may be for refugee women in the camps.”

(Gladden, 2013, pg.81)

4.3 Post-education support for adults

Most women in the study asking for educational opportunities were those under the age of 19, adults over 19 have different reasons for their education desires. Adults are desperate for their children to go to school because they want their children to have better lives. Instead of focusing on themselves and their own well-being, they wish for their children to benefit from school and not end up like their parents, unable to supply basic needs for themselves. “She say…
now you have come to house… if you help me with one child, you take him or her into school. That is the way you can help.” But their hope for adults also lies in that their children will take care of them once they have the means to. A woman said about her children “if they go to school they will get a better life, but now they don’t go to school maybe they will be poor or end up survive like me [...] if the children cannot go to school, how can my life change?”

Coping by religion and utilizing social support from community members and family may assist the person in making meaning out of their situation, it may even help them feel that they are not alone, but an overwhelming amount of young women specifically chose to base their hope in education. Education leads to employment and hopefully post-education support for the adults. Adults work and sacrifice endlessly to see their children overcome obstacles and succeed through education. Children going to school can change the life of the adult because post-education, the parent will no longer need to provide for the child, and they will hopefully be able to rely on their children more for their own needs in the future. If everything else is failing, then adults can have hope that their children will succeed in their education, find a good job, and have a promising future.

4.4 High cost of education

The last topic discussed by Kakuma refugees during interviews introduces the cost barrier for refugees in obtaining their education. Even when there are good schools that are welcoming to refugees and within a reasonable distance of the camp, the cost of education is unaffordable to many refugees. One participant stated, “they build schools, but she can’t always pay the school fees[.]” The cost of education is a heavy burden when refugees are already struggling to find the money to feed and clothe themselves and their families. School fees to cover enrollment, uniforms, books and sometimes transportation are not always manageable by refugees alone and
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they may seek sponsorships from other family members or organizations in order to stay in school. Many adults sacrifice their freedoms for their children to get an education, a participant told Gladden, “most important to [me] is for the children to have education and food for the children…trying to find support for the children by [myself] is the hard thing.” When children do not have sponsors to help with costs it becomes less likely they will get an education, which to them means they will continue living an impoverished life. One refugee was translated saying, “She was orphan at that time, so no one can allow her [by paying for school fees] to go to school.” Another 19-year-old refugee interviewed wants to attend school but her mother, who is now in the hospital, was her sponsor, “each day she thinks, “please, if God helps me she will be back, if God help me, she will help me to go to school.” Her hospitalized mother is not well enough to work extra jobs in order to assist in paying for her school fees. Adults who wish to attend school themselves sacrifice their own aspirations and futures to provide for their children as one participant noted, “There is school for adults, but she has to take care of the kids. She take care and give them good food. They need her help.”

Refugees are desperate to give their children good lives, but often do not have the means to accomplish this. The adults do not have sufficient resources to provide adequate food, shelter, and other necessities for themselves or sometimes even one child. The mother being interviews concluded, “She said that if you help me, if you can help me with my children, to take one maybe to school. That is all.” Like any parent, they want the best for their children, but without a way to change their circumstance, it is hard to imagine life will be any better for their children than it is at the present.

5. Education Barriers for refugees
The interviews form Kakuma Refugee Camp highlight the strong desire refugee women have for education, the hope that lies within it, and the barriers that exist for the women in attaining their schooling. Gathering information from these interviews and other literature on refugee life revealed the plea for quality education is so strong among refugee communities because 1) it is seen as the best way to obtain an improved life, 2) refugees are aware being uneducated in this world is a severe disadvantage and leads to a lower quality of life, and 3) education is difficult to attain in refugee camps.

As discussed, physical needs appear to greatly outweigh mental health in importance to refugees. Education, on the other hand, refugees seem to consider more important in their life as they are demanding education in the midst of their need, instead of, as with mental health, disregarding it. There are a multitude of issues within refugee camps that hinder the chance of real success for refugee education due to barriers that include: cost, discrimination, stress from the pressure to succeed from adults, policy that restricts trades work for refugees in the host country, and stretched resources that cause poor education techniques. In the next section of this paper the author explores the barriers present for refugees that ultimately hinder their aspirations of achieving a better life and the impact it has on the refugees.

5.1 Post-education stress

In some camps there is a strong expectation for young refugees to lift their family out of poverty using the education system. Adults may hope to be supported by their children after they sponsor their education, but this can lead to a burden on the students. One adult reasons, “with good education for our children, we are sure that they will get a good job for survival. This will make us happy because they are our hope for the future. We shall benefit from them” (Addo, 2015, pg.432). If the burden is laid upon the student to provide for the family’s future this is a
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huge concern as it lays excess stress on the student. This stress is double-edged because while a child is expected to stay in school to help their family, they may also feel pressured to help lessen the family’s present burdens by having jobs to help supply money for basic needs. A student remarked, “many of us had to choose between education and survival in the camp” (Mareng, 2010, pg.447). Certainly when family is in need a student would use their school fund to provide instead of using it on their education.

When needs are not being met it becomes much harder to focus on school, “reading is really difficult when there is a certain cloud, such as a hunger [hanging over students]” (Mareng, 2010, pg.447). Some opted to take a “more direct path” in taking care of their needs, rather than suffering through life and getting educated in order to find employment down the road, children are opting to find low-wage jobs in order to fulfill needs immediately (Mareng, 2010). While this action is completely understandable, it also may be at the cost of both their own and their parents’ hope for a better future through education. When choosing a non-educational route at the Kakuma Refugee Camp, young people were ridiculed “for not adhering to the linear path toward higher education,” additionally, “they may encounter social stigma for their willingness to take on low-status work” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.11).

To discuss this topic further, the societal expectation of receiving a good education and providing for the family is a great stress for young refugees. Some may be expected to provide for their families in the future with their education but the needs they have presently they also feel responsibility for (Mareng, 2010). If the student chooses work over education, they have been known to be ostracized and ridiculed. (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018) If not, they are extremely poor and cannot afford basic needs, may ultimately lose funding for school, or cannot concentrate on school-work due to hunger or other issues (Mareng, 2010). All
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of these issues are consequence of not having physical needs available to the people. Physical needs therefore come back into the spotlight as being entirely necessary for the advancement of the refugee population. For education to be a success in refugee camps, students and parents must be relieved of the stress that comes from not having basic needs met. By not providing physical needs for refugees the camp is infringing on more than one basic human right and forcing young people into a no-win situation.

5.2 Inadequate school systems

Some issues for improved lives may lie in the schooling itself. Education is a real tool of hope for refugees but some populations may be putting too much emphasis on education. Intentions started off well in Kakuma Camp according to Bellino, “Kakuma youth, for the most part, shared aspirations to access higher education and gain credentials to attain professional, white-collar employment” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.9). Which encouraged motivating and healthy lifestyles for refugee kids, but before long the drive for success started to hurt refugees as “Many felt these accomplishments were crucial to successful adulthood” and could not attain them (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.9). When success could not be accomplished for any reason, students found themselves dealing with negative self-image and shame from family and friends.

The students were encouraged to put all their hope in education while at the camp, “All students agreed that refrains such as “work hard” and “education is the key to life” were the dominant messages they encountered in school” guiding them to believe education was the only way for them to succeed (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.9). This led to many problems for refugees such as being regarded as a failure in their community when they could not deliver on education’s promise for success, “Kariem’s brothers did not talk to him for a
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week when it became clear that he had no college prospects” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.9). Bellino reveals that Kenya bases its education in “high-stakes” competitive rounds of exams that determine if one may continue their education (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.2). This forces refugees to follow a system where they must devote everything they can into their education hoping they are in the top percent to move on, achieve status “crucial to successful adulthood”, and find employment to make their community proud (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.9). Issues persisted when after completing the rigorous testing refugees discovered the “scarcity of higher education opportunities” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.9) and realized they had been led to believe empty promises about school,

“After completing secondary school and struggling to access opportunities that students had previously believed would be available to them as school-leavers, youth became more critical of the ways that academic and social support manifested in the camp.” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.6)

Refugees need to be made aware of their true odds at getting a job or studying at a higher level. Kakuma students left secondary school “with little understanding of the alternatives” to tertiary education and an “emergent sense of betrayal” due to the perceived promise that completing their education would solve their problems (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.10). Forcing refugees into the dark and distracting them with empty promises is not beneficial even if it does keep youth out of dangerous camp activity. Withholding knowledge from refugees will have negative impacts on their future, Winthrop and Kirk (2008) found education was helpful in increasing hope and drive for young people “but only when students
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saw themselves engaged in meaningful learning” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018). Without a clear purpose for this education, attending school alone did not provide an adequate support system for coping with daily reality and past trauma. With school being their only hope, when school becomes unattainable, they have nothing left to carry them through difficult times and their hope for the future diminishes along with self-image and ability to cope with their circumstances. Refugees may lose hope in their educational system, in this case refugees must have something to place their hope in when education cannot be relied on.

6. Education failing the refugee

Using education as a coping mechanism can fail easily if the education system is too complex, discriminatory, misleading, over-promising, etc. While education is a good tool for refugees to use for temporary coping as they attend, it does not provide a stable source of hope for this population as the education system itself is not yet reliable due to the mentioned limitations. To solve this, other options for success should be presented to refugees. When a child in the US, for example, finds that formal education is not their path they have alternatives such as trade skills that still lead to good futures. Refugees currently do not have the luxury of second hopes as education is presented as the only option for success. This issue begs that the education system for refugees become more stable by providing better teachers, more resources, and financial assistance to keep up with school fees, and/or providing alternate paths to success such as, but not limited to, training in trade skills.

7. Trade school

Due to uncertainties of life and evolving plans and ideas, the center of hope for an individual will change periodically. Refugees must also have the opportunity to take their hope out of one thing, such as education, and place it in a better alternative, something different that
works uniquely better for the individual. It cannot be expected that an entire community of refugees will flourish in school and all receive competitive scholarships into tertiary school and good jobs. There must be options for all refugees so they may ultimately better their lives. For hope to endure and the greatest chance of success to occur, the skills necessary outside of higher education must also be emphasized.

There are plenty of skills to be learned that do not require a competitive scholarship to achieve and that a person can contribute to society while making a comfortable living such as trade skills. Currently there are “legal restrictions on the right to work” (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.2) for refugees set by the host country. These restrictions lessen the value of both education and skills because refugees are not able to put what they have learned into action in order to make an income and provide for themselves. With these regulations there is little point in pouring effort into these activities which causes refugees not to learn them, leaving refugees without a purpose or sense of hope for their future.

At the current time regulations do not allow for electricians, carpenters, and other trade masters to legally practice their trade within a refugee setting. Practicing a refugee’s trade would mean practicing without proper documents and permits. A refugee is unable to obtain legal employment papers because they have no personal documentation and are denied or cannot afford insurance. As the displaced period for refugees has become a longer amount of time, sometimes stretching over two decades, this regulation causes refugees to lose their livelihood and discourages new trades masters from emerging. It is also detrimental to youth who have lost hope in reaching educational goals but could otherwise learn a useful trade to contribute to society. When this researcher was working with refugees in Greece there was a need for a structure to house pro-bono legal workers there to help refugees with paperwork. As soon as
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word of construction was spread and supplies were gathered, refugees who had previously worked as builders in their country came and helped construct the building. It was clear to this researcher how impactful for the refugees it was to once again use their skills and be a help to society. People in refugee camps are searching for ways to succeed and be useful with their time in limbo, if restrictions could be lifted to allow those builders the documents and certification to use their skills it would generate much needed income and purpose for their lives.

8. Transition to sustainable outlets

More reliable sources of hope and stability may come from areas of independence where refugees can provide for themselves outside of schooling. “We need to be trained in modern farming and computing to help us to easily establish ourselves. We want to be entrepreneurs and that is the best way to survive in Ghana, because it is difficult to even get a menial job here (Ghana)” (Addo, 2015, pg.437). Livelihood skills such as building and farming have the potential to foster hope for refugees if formal education is not adequately providing opportunity and long-term financial assurance thus increasing the quality of life in refugee camps. There is already a desire for these outlets, but most host country policies prevent refugees from practicing these trades. If these trade policies could be lifted, refugees might be able to cultivate fresh crops in the surrounding areas and provide for themselves. This would allow UNHCR assistance to go toward more reliable formal education, and other needs that are not as easily met within the camp, rather than trying to supply and delegate the amount of food necessary to feed millions of people every day.

Communities need to establish a sense of agency and be self-reliant in basic needs so that the UN can focus on providing good education where the host countries fall short. Education must be taken seriously to break this loop of economic downturn in refugee livelihoods. By not
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providing physical needs, or the conditions for physical needs to be satisfied, it takes away
refugees right for a decent education.

If refugees were given the resources to grow their own food and feed themselves, which
undoubtedly would be a large undertaking, agencies intending to help these people may in turn
be able to better provide schooling and better medical and hygiene services. From the literature
and secondary data discussed in this paper it may be gathered that the cause of many barriers to
success that refugees face is not getting enough food and having no shelter, which is an unstable
base to build an educational community on. These conditions prevent the refugee from focusing
on receiving an education to better themselves and from providing aid to struggling neighbors.
With a good school system built on a solid base of reliable resources, there may be hope that
refugees will be able to place their hope in being a regular person, in being able to support
themselves, and in having a sense of agency and a future.

9. Economic impact on society

The aforementioned limitations provide many problems including the high chance of
diminished hope in education, but the economic value of a person is much greater after
education. It is within the entire globes best interest to make education available in refugee
camps so they are able to contribute to society instead of pull from it. “About 7.7 million
children being cared for by the UNHCR are below the age of 18 years” (Meda, Sookrajh, &
Maharaj, 2012). The resources, and lack thereof, that refugees are given while they are in camps
affect the entire global population in its economic system. At a minimum there are 7.7 million
children being cared for by the UNHRC, if these children grow up without quality education that
would result in millions of able bodied and bright minded individual’s human potential to be
wasted. Due to the fast-expanding population of displaced people “the Millennium Development
Goal of achieving Universal Primary Education is likely to become increasingly difficult to attain” resulting in more poorly uneducated children (Meda, Sookrajh, & Maharaj, 2012, pg.164). In theory this could mean less medical discovery and more disease, less safe communities and more poverty-stricken blighted neighborhoods, and it could also mean less peace and more violence and war. It could mean more refugee camps, detainment centers, broken homes, and less hope for the future. Less education leads to lower wages, more stress on the government, higher crime rates, and wasted human capital. This creates a less attractive and productive world environment. Preventing children from education hurts the entire global organism as well as the individual child.

The current system was not as problematic when the stay at a refugee camp was short term but now that temporary stays have become more permanent, organizations must begin utilizing programs and resources that are sustainable for the modern refugee communities. As world violence and the number of refugees increase it will become continually harder for the UNHCR and non-profit organizations to provide for those in need causing more wasted human capital than before. The current system has millions of lives halted in limbo with uncertain futures and little hope of contributing to society. The humanitarian and governmental help refugees are receiving right now only act as a bandage over the wound.

There is a dire need for improvement among the structure of UNHCR aid. In order for the quality of life for refugees to improve the quality and quantity of basic necessities must be met. As Gladden found for Sudanese refugee women in the Kakuma refugee camp in East Africa, the refugees cannot focus on being a useful and active contributor to society, acclimate themselves to a new land, and prepare for an impactful future that will enhance the quality of society if they
are prevented from experiencing relief from past trauma and fail to receive quality education due to a lack of primary needs.

10. Conclusion

Education provides purpose and directs energy toward achieving goals, resulting most commonly in economic benefit for the community while also delivering a sense a pride within the individual. Employment, healthy learning and living environments for refugees, and post-education support for adults are all benefits of education that could be helpful to refugees if not for the barriers that hinder their success.

Along with lack of education needs, the lack of physical needs acts as a barrier for most refugees. Schooling becomes unattainable due to lack of physical needs and mental health needs are then pushed to the back. If physical needs could be met sustainably by refugees, the government and organizations currently supplying needs could then finally focus more on improving refugee conditions. Overall, education standards and opportunity must improve for refugees. When refugees are struggling mentally and physically, schooling is a tangible measure of hope they can rely on. Education is often seen as the refugees only hope for monetary security and, in some cases, resettlement, through obtaining scholarships for higher education. For some refugees it is also viewed as the most obtainable way to “not only help themselves but also their families, and possibly their country in the future as well” (Gladden, 2013, pg.69). Education provides the greatest current opportunity for “hope, stability and a better future” (Meda, Sookrajh, & Maharaj, 2012. Pg.157). It provides a platform for the refugee to escape the reality of refugee living and move onto self-reliance with trades and other life skills learned. Being able to grow food and provide for themselves offers the ability to advance their own position and well-being by providing for themselves.
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Researchers are unanimously supportive of education within a refugee context deeming it a successful “normalizing routine which can help refugee children deal with hardships (Meda, Sookrajh, & Maharaj, 2012, pg.157) and “inherently restorative, (Bellino & Kakuma Youth Research Group, 2018, pg.1)… aimed at protecting young people from harm and orienting them toward the promise of a better future,” as long as it is not used as false promise. One refugee concludes that with education, “every refugee child becomes better equipped to respond effectively when faced with uncertain conditions” and it is therefore the greatest tool a refugee child can receive as it gives them a greater chance of success throughout life (Mareng, 2010, pg.479). Education is a specific need for refugees to inspire hope and cope with loss and trauma. It is seen as a way out of the refugee camp and a way to help themselves and their families by eventually obtaining a good job or scholarship to a university.

The UNHCR declares education essential as a human right in the CRC of 1989 stating “every child must access education regardless of his/her nationality and status” (Meda, Sookrajh, & Maharaj, 2012, pg.164) as it is a useful tool of protection and psychosocial need while also promoting “self-reliance and social and economic development by building human capital” (Meda, Sookrajh, & Maharaj, 2012, pg.157). These psychologic, social, and opportunistic benefits are both desired and necessary for assurance in refugee hopes of being resettled and joining a new community.
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References:


